

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4

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Articles not credited are by the editor.

The club meets the second Tuesday of the month, except July and August, at the United Church on Comox Ave., Comox 7:30 p.m.

May 4

Executive meeting at the home of **Ann Chevrier**, 417 King Rd., Comox.

May 11

Annual General Meeting at the home of **Madeleine & Len Simmons**. Remember to bring a lawn chair, and come early in order to spend time admiring the hundreds of rhodos and other plants in the garden.

April 13

Ron Knight, Pres. of the Vancouver Rhodo Society, presented a condensed college education in "How to Give Rhodos the Same Kind of Home in B.C. Gardens as they have in the Himalayas". A very enjoyable as well as educational evening.

MEMBER NOTES

May must be the busiest month in Rhodoland. May 2, our plant sale and show of rhodo trusses, May 8 our tour of 7 individual and spectacular gardens. Tickets can be purchased at Art Knapp's or the Home & Garden Gate. The rest of the month can be taken up with admiring gardens - your own, your friends and neighbours, and other rhodo clubs. Perhaps, after the mad rush to get the garden ready for summer, a comfortable chair and a good book to read under a tree will be the order of the day (week, month). Have a happy time!

I have spent the past year or so acquiring and enjoying several kinds of orchids, with a view to having some challenging plants to work with in the winter months. The *Phalaenopsis* have been particularly easy to grow, loaded with flowers all winter, and now going into a resting period while I try to "catch up" on the dandelions and creeping buttercups in the garden. Orchids make great companion plants for rhodos! By the way, I read some orchids make interesting ground cover for rhodos in the Himalayas.

Amateur Gardening magazine is always full of gardening tips and interesting articles. I was sorry to read the following in the 27 March issue:

"Emergency measures are being taken to prevent the spread of Ramoran dieback, the fungal disease formerly known as Sudden Oak Death. While plant experts insist this is not a new Dutch Elm Disease-style epidemic, they're clearly worried about the

disease's spread.

There have now been about 350 confirmed cases of ramoran dieback in the UK, and parts of infected gardens are being cordoned off - effectively put into quarantine - in a bid to prevent its spread.

The Govt. Dept. for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs recognizes that burning of affected plants is controversial, but says immediate action must be taken. The disease is spreading rapidly on rhodo bushes".

There are several other interesting tid-bits in the same magazine. A new range of foxgloves, the Camelot series, has arrived in England from the US, and made a great impression at the Chelsea Show. They all have huge spots, and can be seen in colours from 'Camelot White' to 'Camelot Cream', 'Rose' and 'Lavender'. These plants do so well here, seeding themselves around the garden. They make striking companions for the rhodos, and are so easy to start from seed.

Did you know **Joseph Banks**, one of the founders of the RHS, went on a plant-hunting expedition with Captain Cook, and discovered 1300 new species in the one trip?

Did you know gardens are dangerous places to work? In Britain, there are 44,000 garden equipment accidents each year. Mowers - 6500 accidents, flowerpots - 5300 accidents, secateurs and pruners - 4400, spades - 3600, and electric hedge trimmers - 3100 accidents. Be careful!!

DIANA SCOTT told us all about her trip to the Northwest Garden Show in Seattle, and here is the rest of her article " We had fully intended to take in some of the many lectures offered each day, but couldn't seem to fit them in! *International* gardening experts and designers from all corners of the globe shared their wit and wisdom at more than 100 informative seminars over the course of the show. This year's topics covered everything from planting basics to incorporating art into the garden. Brian Minter was there as well as one of the grande dames of garden design, Mary Keen.

I'm always on the lookout for interesting plants to add to our garden, so I was closely checking out the displays and the market area. A grass-like plant from the restio family called *Ischyrolepis subverticillata* caught my eye. This is a dramatic perennial much like a giant horsetail in appearance. It forms broad, thick clumps with individual stems rising as much as 8'. Spaced along them are whorls of many spreading, dark green branchlets, with only narrow brown bracts for leaves. It thrives in sun or shade near the coast, in well drained, non-alkaline soil, with moderate regular watering. It's hardy to about -6C, but needs protection from hard frosts. After the winter we've just been through, I guess that leaves us out!

A plant that is more typical of our gardens is *Nandina* or Heavenly Bamboo. The variety called "Gulf Stream" was used extensively in the display gardens and looked wonderful in its winter tints of red and orange. It is a shorter, more dense variety, growing about 3' high and almost as wide. It rarely blooms, but the colourful foliage more than makes up for that. Once established, it takes little summer water, which is exactly the type of plant that I'm looking for. The variety "Gulf

Stream" is one of the many 2004 Great Plant Picks (www.greatplantpicks.org) that were used in the show. There were a few rhodos, with *R. mucronulatum* in bloom and others on display. The local Rhodo Society had a booth and NIRS was listed on their chart.

Although daily admission ranged from \$16 US for advance tickets to \$19 US at the door, we were able to get our tickets for \$14 US as part of our hotel package. We stayed at one of the hotels listed on the Show's website, and enjoyed a lovely room, complementary breakfasts, and a free shuttle to the show as well as to shopping and restaurants, all at a reasonable price. As a break from the ravages of winter, I'd highly recommend the Northwest Flower and Garden Show!

IT'S ALL IN YOUR POINT OF VIEW!

I saved this little gem from an April 1996 copy of a newsletter "The Yak" from one of the Fraser Valley Rhodo Societies. Indumentum, a regular columnist, wrote:

"While browsing through the Cloverdale Public Library archives recently, looking for information on why there are so few rhodo species native to Surrey, I came across the newsletter of the Ganges North Maple Society. This organization meets on the 3d Wednesday of every month in a Temple Hall a few Km north of Katmandu, Nepal. There were articles on themes such as "Companion Plants for Maples: The use of Rhodos to fill in the Gaps", "Avoiding Invasive Rhodo Roots" and "Why Maple Species are Superior to Hybrids".

Yes, it seems there are species snobs even in the Maple societies and the most far-out are the lovers of large-leaved species. These obsessives will go to the ends of the earth to seek out specimens of their adored

treasures.

It was fascinating to read an elaborate account of a lecture given by a famous Nepalese plant explorer who had recently mounted an expedition to Western Canada in search of the rare and coveted *Acer macrophyllum*, the maple with the largest leaves in the world. He paddled a small canoe up something called Howe Sound and was astonished to find huge groves of Bigleaf Maples growing between elevations of sea level to 500 metres in mixed woodland. Some of these specimens must have been more than 100 years old and were tens of metres high!

Mustapha Notherplant explored the woods for several days, collecting seed pods and taking photos of these ancient giants. He was about to get back into his canoe when he smelled smoke and was aghast to discover the local people cutting down the enormous maple trees and using them for firewood!

At this point in the narrative, the newsletter reported that gasps of astonishment rose from the audience, for they were horrified to hear of such sacrilege. Although a heated discussion ensued, the night was getting cool and Mustapha threw another log of *R. hodgsonii* onto the open fire. One of the members complained that the society should set a better example as that log would have made a perfectly good yak saddle."

RHODO SPECIES FOUNDATION NEWS

If you plan (or wish) to buy plants from the RSF, here is a new simplified way of delivering them to your garden. This spring, all plants ordered by RSF members in B.C. will be delivered together to the Botanical Garden at UBC, which will act as distribution centre. Customs

will have been cleared, and one Phytosanitary Certificate will be shared. A flat \$10.00 US charge will be added to each order and members will have a week to pick up their orders. Speak to Harry for more details, or phone Joe Ronsley at 604-921-9444 (email jronsley@telus.net)

VIYERAS - a futher note

I planned to attend the MARS Rhodo Show, but alas, arrived just as they were packing up. However, I noticed a man carrying out a display of Vireya rhodos, and quickly got his address from a card attached to one of the plants.

Sans Pariel Rare Plants, 804 San Malo Crescent, Parkesville, V9P 1S4, phone 250-248-5563.

HARRY WRIGHT SAYS don't forget to hand over your list of "do-gooders" in your garden, even though you gave him one several years ago. As everyone knows, there have been changes. For instance, I chopped down a Virginia Richards and a Unique, and would no longer recommend them, because of powdery mildew. R. George's Delight is a beautiful plant, but it didn't like my garden. Perhaps it is time to make a new (or at least revised) list!

A FEW MORE MEMBER NOTES

Don't forget to consider opening your garden one day or evening, to members for a mini-tour. Again, give Harry a list of dates and times.

If you have a trip to Vancouver on your calendar, note there is a Garden Show at Van Dusen Gardens June 10 - 13. Display gardens, exhibitors, speakers and entertainment. Cost for Adults \$13.00, Seniors \$12.00.

AND if you are planning a day in Nanaimo during the next month or so, be sure to take a wander through

the Hailey Rhodo Grove in the Millstone area of Bowen Park. There are over 350 rhodos to admire. The Rhodo Society of Nanaimo took on the task of mapping, identifying and cataloguing the plants, a work started 10 years ago and still ongoing.

The garden was started with a gift from the late **Mrs. Eileen Hailey**, who was a resident of Nanaimo when she died in 1975, and who had been a founding member of the Vancouver Rhodo Society. This note from the MARS newsletter, Feb. 2001.

John Watson has kindly offered to take on the position of Ways & Means for the coming two years, but several other people are still needed - 1 Social convenor, 1 or 2 for the Revenue Table and 1 or 2 for planning Programs.

CYCLAMEN

How shall we sound its mystic name
Of Greek descent and Persian fame?
Shall 'y' be long and 'a' be short
Or will the 'y' and 'a' retort?
Shall 'y' be lightly rippled o'er
Or should we emphasize it more?
Alas! the doctors disagree for 'y's' a doubtful quantity.
Some people use it now and then
As if t'were written "Sickly-men"
But as it comes from 'kuklos', Greek,
Why not "kick-laymen" so to speak?
The gardener with his ready wit,
Upon another mode has hit;
He's terse and brief, long names dislikes
And so he renders it as "Sykes".
Dave Godfrey kindly offered this gem. Author unknown.

Here are a couple of thought-provoking items from the Portland Rhodo Newsletter of May 2000:

In the 1949 ARS Rhodo Yearbook, there was an article on "Use of Dynamite in Rhodo Planting". The challenge was how to plant a large

number of valuable species rhodos in an area with too many fir trees. The men removed a number of 18" firs with blasting powder.

The operation proved successful. The deep holes resulting from the blast were filled first with forest rubble to almost ground level, the rhodos set on top and peaty soil mounded loosely over them. Rain during the winter helped pack the soil.

Can you imagine how much paperwork one would need to do this work today?

And - Pruning for Fun!

Some people enjoy creating bonsai, and there are several azaleas and rhodos that lend themselves to this. Creating a bonsai can be hazardous to the plant, for it takes practise to get it just rioght. The bonsai process not only includes pruning but systematic soil replacement. The tender roots of rhodos and azaleas might wince a bit.

Most people use plants with smaller leaves and flowers. The smaller leaved plants are typicalling more drought resistant, and easier to prune. Keep in mind not all varieties enjoy being in a pot, let alone being pruned.

Topiary may be something for the more daring or playful gardener. Imagine a giant pink turtle or mushroom in the garden. Try R. Elizabeth or Az. Edward Collins; R. odoratum oꝛ Az. Whitewater. Other fun shapes can include bonsai shapes such as cascade or windblown.

Ed. Note: Sometimes one can find plants at the back of the nursery, discarded because of their odd shapes - just right for bonsai (and cheaper than usual too).

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

Rose-Marie has sent news of some of her favorite annuals.

"A manageable annual, and a good choice for those of us smitten by blue flowers, is *Salvia farinosa* 'Strata'.

Because I have only a cool greenhouse in which to start my annuals, this plant doesn't begin to bloom for me until mid-August, but the display is continuous til frost. It is about 20" tall in a 10" wide clump, with silvery foliage and spikes of blue and white flowers. It has been giving me great pleasure growing in small groups planted on either side of my shrub-bordered front walk.

When the salvias bloom, the other plants there are only promising flowers, and the hostas are looking a little tired.

If I have a favorite annual it is a tiny thing that is perhaps so lovable because it so rare. My father used to grow it from his own seed, but unfortunately I have had no consistent success getting viable seed from my plants, and seed is very difficult to find commercially. Mine have been coming from Chiltern Seeds in England, though Thompson & Morgan used to sell them. Still, *Leptosiphon* is worth the trouble. It is an awkward name for a plant of great delicacy. It is only 4" high, has very small leaves and delightful starry blooms, not a half-inch across, in innumerable shades of very pretty pastels. I know only the generic name as not even the new reference encyclopedia *FLORA* lists it."

Ed. Note: I found this plant, syn. *Linanthus*, in the Alpine Society's Encyclopedia of Alpines. It is a California native.

^{sh} I (Rose-Marie) was lucky enough to find a copy of the new reference encyclopedia *FLORA*, under the Christmas tree, complete with a gorgeous calendar and a screensaver for the computer that flashes mouth-watering floral photos, including

time-lapse photography of opening blossoms. I am finding the book so useful (I'm averaging about 6 visits a day) that I've asked Santa to make a bookstand for it. It's very similar to the Reader's Digest encyclopedia, but so far I am finding *FLORA* to have more information, and it is certainly current."

FERTILIZING THE ORGANIC WAY

Terry Richmond of Port Alberni wrote in the Nanaimo Rhodo Newsletter of Nov. 2002:

When fertilizing rhodos, we should look to nature to show us the way. In nature, mulching and fertilizing is a continuous process with the current year's mulch being gradually transformed in subsequent years to usable fertilizer. Nature's rhodo food begins with a leaf, needle, twig, petal and fruitfall - in short, any and all matter that falls to earth or flows into the area in ground water.

Rhodos, because of their environment and the shallow layer of organic matter in which they grow, have evolved a massive root system consisting of literally thousands of tiny, shallow running feeder roots. These roots are extremely efficient in extracting life sustaining plant nutrients from their immediate area. Root systems will be much smaller in a benign climate because a smaller amount of nutrients is required to maintain plant health. Conversely, rhodos in exposed and/or harsh conditions will have a vastly increased root system to extract every ounce of nourishment from their surroundings.

So, how do we fertilize rhodos in our garden? First, any literature on fertilizing rhododendrons assumes that your plants are growing in the correct medium. Again, as in nature, this medium should be extremely high in organic matter, well drained,

well aerated and moderately to slightly acidic. Fir and pine bark, composted oak leaves and evergreen needles, decayed wood, well rotted sawdust, coarse peat moss, reed sedge and topsoil high in organic matter are some of the materials that can be combined in endless combinations to provide excellent growing media.

Growing medium acidity or pH value is not nearly as critical when growing plants in an organic medium using primarily organic fertilizers. One good quality compost for rhodos contains oak leaves, evergreen needles, alfalfa and washed seaweed. Between various layers, an organic nitrogen such as canola meal, fish meal or blood meal can be added.

A word of caution! Rhodos, because of their tiny feeder roots, can be easily damaged through over-fertilization, especially when using high analysis chemical fertilizers. Elements to be cautious using include nitrogen, iron, sulfur, boron, sodium and calcium. Contrary to popular belief, rhodos do not hate calcium. In actual fact the reverse is true. They will gorge themselves on available calcium until they make themselves sick. With respect to iron, a few years back a respected rhodo grower suggested I supply more iron to help combat the effect of full sunlight on my exposed garden. He was undoubtedly right, but I supplied so much iron sulfate that severe leaf scorching occurred. A little fertilizer goes a long way, especially with small plants.